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ANTI-JEWISH GUILT DEFLECTION AND NATIONAL SELF-VICTIMIZATION: ANTISEMITISM IN GERMANY

Samuel Salzborn

I. Introduction

The various forms of antisemitism seen in Germany's public discourse all share one common factor: an explicit or implicit deflection of guilt and denial of responsibility for National Socialism and the Shoah. This applies not only to the openly racist antisemitism of the neo-Nazis and the more "respectable" antisemitism of mainstream society, but also to the left-wing antisemitism that so frequently underlies criticism of Israel and globalization. This deflection of one's own guilt is a unifying factor found across the political spectrum. Motivated by the desire to exonerate Germany of past misdeeds, this guilt-deflecting antisemitism exists "not *despite* Auschwitz, but rather *because* of it," as put by Henryk M. Broder (1986: 11, emphasis in the original); within the politics of remembrance in Germany, it tries to blame the Jews for the consequences of the Shoah, redefining the Holocaust as an inconvenient disturbance within the national act of remembrance. This desire to (re) establish a national identity, and a normality that draws a *Schlussstrich* ("concluding line") under the past, has been disturbed by memories of the Holocaust; however, instead of tracing this disturbance to Nazi Germany's mass extermination of European Jews, blame is placed on the victims instead, who (in this worldview) are stubbornly refusing to put away the past: "In this country, there dominates [...] a particular form of antisemitism that is superficially 'correct' in its general rejection of traditional anti-Jewish prejudices, but which extricates the issue and the debate from the questionable handling of the Nazi past and the Holocaust, clinging instead to the 'question of responsibility,' as well as to the work and 'act' of remembrance that so many Germans find unpleasant." (Ahlheim/Heger 2002: 49f.)

Ever since the German mass murder of European Jews more than half a century ago, antisemitism has developed a certain need for self-justification; therefore, to facilitate this act of social self-exoneration, Jews are needed to play the role of perpetrators, not victims (cf. Haury

2002; Markovits 2006, 2007; Markovits/Reich 1997). However, as Werner Bergmann (2002) points out, although this specifically German form of antisemitism may be secondary in nature, its expression nonetheless remains traditionally antisemitic. Even if contemporary attitudes—characterizing “the Jews” as powerful, influential, and avaricious—may not generally share the genocidal goals found in Nazi-inspired antisemitism, they still do share its delusional projections as well as the tribal desire for segregation.

In the midst of this yearning for normality, there emerged in 2002 a political, social, and media storm surrounding the antisemites Jürgen Möllemann and Martin Walser; this controversy was a watershed event in postwar German history, helping to normalize antisemitic sentiments as representing an ostensibly unproblematic political position, leading to an “Ende der Schonzeit” (“end to the kid gloves”), as aptly expressed by Salomon Korn (2002), which did not signal the emergence of a new antisemitism, but rather the exposure of a latent one (such as that existing under the guise of anti-Zionism, among others). Here, one refers to the 15% to 20% of Germans who exhibit latently antisemitic tendencies, a statistic repeatedly confirmed by opinion pollsters over the years (cf. Bergmann/Erb 1991; for a critical evaluation, cf. Salzborn 2007). There had already been many attempts to arouse this latent antisemitism, such as in the controversy surrounding the Fassbinder play “Trash, the City, and Death” (1985), or during the *Historikerstreit* (“historians’ dispute”) in 1986 (cf. Diner 1987). In the past, antisemitic statements in the public sphere had been consistently rejected by the majority, with the ostensible taboo-breaking being named for what it was: a rebellion against the arduously won civilizing elements of postwar German society (cf. Pelinka 2002). This attitude changed in 2002; since then, secondary antisemitism oriented towards deflecting guilt has become socially acceptable in Germany.¹ In this development, two factors played decisive roles: on the one hand was the lifting of taboos against expressing antisemitic sentiments in the public sphere, and on the other hand was their linkage with the new discourse that presented Germans as victims. The concrete result is that antisemitism can now be openly communicated in Germany,

¹ Wolfgang Frindte (2006: 124f.) rightly pointed out that numerous antisemitic “taboo-breakings” had already happened before 2002, although the resulting social responses varied enormously through the decades of West German history up to 2002.

as long as it is formulated in the stereotypes geared towards deflecting guilt regarding National Socialism, or if it is directed against Israel and/or Zionism; however, recent years have also seen the intertwining of guilt-deflecting antisemitism with the fantasy of Germans having become victims in their own right, in an attempt to formulate a national collective victimhood, as seen in recent debates regarding the flight and expulsion of Germans in the aftermath of National Socialism, as well as the so-called *Bombenkrieg* (“bombing war”).

The present article aims to analyze this development in two steps. First, empirical data demonstrating the virulence of guilt-deflecting antisemitism in Germany will be introduced, and the development of guilt deflection will be discussed. Then, the relationship between antisemitic guilt deflection and the national victim mythos will be described and analyzed.

II. *The Origins and Empirical Aspects of Antisemitic Guilt Deflection*

When the first surveys regarding the Nazi past were conducted in Germany after the end of World War II, antisemitic attitudes proved to be not the exception, but the rule. In the period just after the Allies abolished National Socialism, the open declaration of antisemitic beliefs still existed as an ideological convention within social normality, which had hardly been shaken at all by the subjective shock of the German defeat, or by the Allied occupation of Germany: according to the first survey conducted within the American occupation zone in December 1946, 18% of the population were classified as “hard” antisemites, another 21% were antisemites, and 22% were racists (cf. Bergmann/Erb 1997: 398).

This was hardly surprising and simply emphasized how mistaken the Allies had been in their early assumptions: at the war’s beginning, there had still existed the prevalent belief that the majority of Germans were at least privately estranged from the Nazi regime and its ideological foundations (cf. Padover 2001). However, it was not as if the Germans had completely lost their moral compass: it was simply that this moral sense was not much oriented towards the philosophical traditions of republican civil society, as the Allies had expected; instead, it was deeply interwoven with an antisemitic and racist worldview that had become part of everyday life in German society, thereby constituting part of the consensual norm for most people. The framework

of values, norms and morals had not been annulled, but instead had been shifted so far into the *völkisch* ("ethno-nationalist") extreme that antisemitism could function as a useful delusion for interpreting the wider world, without actually contradicting the "gesunder Menschenverstand" ("healthy common sense") of most Germans (cf. Salzborn 2002: 8ff.). The people were very willing to be guided by this particular conception of "gesunder Menschenverstand," as put by Karin Orth (2002: 105), but this must ultimately be understood as a coded term for the antisemitic and racist consensus.

In this context, it was only logical that when the first nationwide empirical surveys were conducted in the autumn of 1949—the founding year of the Federal Republic of Germany—one quarter of the German populace still identified itself as antisemites, and this percentage had even risen to one third of respondents in 1952 (cf. Bergmann/Erb 1997: 399). The social climate of the 1950s was characterized by a renazification, or an insufficient denazification (cf. Frei 1997; Hoffmann 1992: 107ff.). It was a time in which a "grand peace treaty with the perpetrators" was made, as put by Ralph Giordano (1996: 13). In this period, (neo)Nazi splinter groups, parties, and publications emerged; former National Socialists became "reintegrated" into politics, industry, academia, and the civil service; efforts to continue the denazification process either faded away or were deliberately terminated; and a great number of Nazi trials became more characterized by a solidarity with the accused than by a rigorous political and legal confrontation with the various groups of perpetrators. At the same time, the Federal Republic saw a massive wave of antisemitic acts, such as the numerous desecrations of Jewish cemeteries and synagogues (cf. Reichel 2001: 125ff.).

The Allies, with the support of democratic voices within the Federal Republic, pushed for a critical examination of Nazi crimes committed against the Jews, resulting in the decision that redress payments needed to be made, and that the political stance towards the State of Israel should be free of any antisemitic sentiments: these measures were all met by rejection from the German populace. In August 1952, nearly half of German respondents spoke against the redress payments to Israel, while another 24% accepted the need for redress but considered the amount too high, and just 11% approved of the redress as it was (cf. Noelle/Neumann 1956: 130): "This rejection was expressed in the form of traditional anti-Jewish prejudices (accusations of greed and

vindictiveness), which seemed 'confirmed' by Jewish demands (reversal of guilt)." (Bergmann/Erb 1997: 400)

With the economic and political solidification of the Federal Republic, as well as the legal battles against neo-Nazi parties such as the Socialist Reich Party (banned in 1952 by the Federal Constitutional Court, due to its openly National Socialist platform), a reestablishment of democratic frameworks, and a change of personnel (if only gradual and sometimes only marginal) within the public sphere, contemporary survey statistics began to register a slow decrease in the percentage of open antisemites in West Germany during the late 1950s and the 1960s.

A survey question regarding social distance was repeatedly posed over the years: "Would you say that it would be better for Germany if there were no Jews in the country?" In 1952, 37% of respondents agreed, but the percentage gradually decreased (28% in 1956, 22% in 1958, 18% in 1963, 19% in 1965), dropping to 9% in 1983 (cf. Köchner 1986: 23). Although the percentage in agreement increased again to 13.1% in 1987, the percentage in disagreement exhibited an overall increasing trend (from 19% in 1952 to 66.8% in 1987) (cf. Institut für Demoskopie 1987: table 13g),² demonstrating that West Germany had seen a reduction (sometimes steady, sometimes fitful) in openly expressed antisemitism. However, although public forms of antisemitism were becoming increasingly rejected, there was still a consistent tolerance for antisemitic statements in the private sphere. When the Allensbach Institut für Demoskopie conducted a survey in 1986, asking if the respondent could maintain a friendship with an acquaintance who earnestly called for the banishment of Jews from West Germany, 40% said they could, and only 26% said it was hardly possible, while another 34% declined to answer the question (cf. Köcher 1986: 57).

According to Werner Bergmann, this discrepancy between private tolerance and public rejection of antisemitism could be taken as evidence of "the tabooing and latency of antisemitism in the FRG, which is less about having implemented a comprehensive change in attitude, and more about simply displacing the prejudice into latency." (Bergmann 1990: 117) This conclusion is further corroborated by the finding that, to a large extent, survey respondents considered the

² For the survey conducted in the autumn of 1987, the question was slightly modified: "For us Germans it would be best if all Jews went to Israel."

communication of antisemitic statements to be forbidden, especially in the public and political spheres (cf. *ibid.*: 118). Thus, a communicative latency regarding antisemitic ideas could exist simultaneously with a psychological actuality (cf. *ibid.*: 112).

Looking at early empirical studies concerning the rejection of *shilumim*—the Israeli expression corresponding to the German terms “Entschädigungen” and “Reparationen” (“redress” and “reparations”)³—which was accompanied by antisemitic guilt reversal and accusations of profiteering, it becomes apparent that, even in the early 1950s, traditional antisemitic motifs were already accompanied by secondary antisemitism; this did not represent a component of official ideology, but rather the social articulation (both public and private) of vague conspiracy fantasies and the desire for exoneration. This development is especially relevant in the context of communicative latency, because it points to a shift in antisemitic articulation.

Almost thirty years ago, Alphons Silbermann (1982: 45, 57 and 62) found that, of the various antisemitic motifs, economically articulated antisemitism met with much more agreement than racially or politically based ones. Around 45% of German respondents more or less explicitly agreed with economically framed antisemitism, while less than 20% rejected such ideas (cf. *ibid.*: 57). When asked about a racially motivated antisemitism—and therefore the type that was considered mostly likely to draw public censure—“only” about 30% either strongly or somewhat agreed, while nearly 35% rejected it (cf. *ibid.*: 45). In terms of concrete expressions of “economic antisemitism,” surveys from 1960 to 1986/87 showed a constant figure of around 20% accusing “the Jews” of being stingy, with around 30% accusing them of being calculating; in the 1960s, around 55% ascribed business success to “the Jews,” with this figure rising to 74.6% in 1987 (cf. Bergmann 1990: 120).

Put into the context of a massive denial of guilt—by the early 1960s, nearly 90% of Germans were rejecting any suggestion of complicity in the genocide of the Jews (cf. Noelle/Neumann 1965: 229)—such antisemitic claims of a specifically Jewish hunger for money and power bear particular significance, demonstrating that Germans felt unsettled

³ *Shilumim* is actually closer to the word “payments,” whereby the term lacks any connotation of pardon or forgiveness, which the German terms *Entschädigung*, *Reparation*, or *Wiedergutmachung* (literally “making good again”) would gladly buy semantically—as if the German mass murder of European Jews could be “made good again.”

in their national conscience and wanted to deny all responsibility for Nazi crimes, believing that the national *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung* (“processing of the past”) was solely driven by an imagined Jewish conspiracy: “A large part of the populace sees itself being subjected to a ‘permanent guilt’ because, in their view, ‘the Jews’ seem insistent on keeping alive this memory. This feeling stands in tense counterpoint to their own wish to finally draw a *Schlussstrich* under the past.” (Bergmann 1990: 124)

As manifestations of antisemitism have shifted over time towards secondary antisemitism, with the goal of achieving the moral and historiographical exoneration of antisemitic thought, not only have secondary antisemitic motifs failed to fade away, they have even found generally increasing support within the German populace, with the tendency towards open expressions of antisemitic and anti-Jewish convictions growing in recent years. In 1994, an EMNID survey showed that 44% of West Germans and 19% of East Germans were of the opinion that “the Jews” were exploiting “the National Socialist Holocaust for their own purposes” (nationwide: 39%) (cf. EMNID-Institut 1994: table 19). Similar findings were also revealed by an ALLBUS survey conducted in 1996, in which some 44% of German respondents strongly or somewhat supported the opinion that Jews were exploiting the German past.

This shows that while manifest and explicitly Nazi-inspired antisemitism has continually decreased over time in the Federal Republic, secondary antisemitism, often expressed in non-public settings, has remained constant, and even found growing approval in recent years. However, until the mid-1990s, and despite all resistance by right-wing extremists as well as conservatives, the public and political spheres were ultimately dominated by a broad consensus in which antisemitic indiscretions were socially censured and decisively repudiated as being intolerable within a democratic framework, thus demonstrating that no affirmation of antisemitic ideas could be accepted as simply another “opinion” that was ostensibly just as valid as any other (cf. Habermas 2002).

This status quo underwent a major shift in the autumn of 1998, when Martin Walser gave a speech in Frankfurt’s Paulskirche during the award ceremony of the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade (cf. Walser 1998a). Walser’s speech drew strongly on the traditions of guilt-deflecting antisemitism in denouncing critical examinations of the past as well as the “moral bludgeon” of Auschwitz, whose pervasiveness

he highly overestimated. He spoke of a "never-ending display of our shame" and an "instrumentalization of our shame for today's purposes," of a "gruesome memorial profession" and of the media's "routine of incrimination," before he, trembling "with daring," declared (cf. *ibid.*):

It is inappropriate to turn Auschwitz into a routine threat, a tool for browbeating people at any occasion, a moral bludgeon or even just an obligatory exercise. [...] In the debate surrounding Berlin's Holocaust Memorial, ensuing ages will see what was wrought by people who felt accountable to the conscience of others. Concreting over the middle of the capital with a nightmare the size of a football field. The monumentalization of shame. (*Ibid.*)

The self-conscious eroticism of one trembling with daring, which Walser displayed before his audience, demonstrated the pleasure he apparently derived from presenting himself as a taboo-breaker—and not only Walser, but also numerous other Germans. For it was not just the content of Walser's speech that was alarming, but also the context: nearly the entire audience at the Paulskirche applauded his speech, with only a few people such as Ignatz Bubis withholding approval (cf. Bubis 1998a).

According to the language researcher Siegfried Jäger, Walser's speech in Frankfurt kicked off a discourse that gave "new impetus to the further undemocratic development of this society": "For it is not only on the right-wing fringe, but also within the mainstream society of recent years, that it has once again become possible to say—at first in code, and then with increasing explicitness—the idea that had been taboo in postwar Germany: Auschwitz is finished and forgotten!" (Jäger 1999: 14)

Walser's speech was not in fact unequivocally and unmistakably condemned as intolerable by the political and social establishment, as in comparable cases before, and Walser was not interpreted as falling entirely outside the democratic consensus. On the contrary, it was Bubis who was subsequently compelled to publicly justify his criticism of Walser. The partisanship in favor of Walser reached deep into the populace (cf. Walser 1998b; Dietzsch/Jäger/Schobert 1999; Heckmann 1998; Scheffer 1998), so that the newspaper editorial pages were nearly overflowing with articles sympathetic to his speech—and with antisemitic invective directed at Bubis (Rohloff 1999: 75ff.). Furthermore, ever since Walser gave his speech at the Paulskirche, there has not only been an increase in antisemitic hate mail, such as that which

arrives every week at the Central Council of Jews in Germany, but many citizens have also become confident enough to give up anonymity and attach their full name and address as they give free rein to their antisemitic statements. Overall, these developments were enough to inspire Joachim Rohloff (1999) to coin a phrase in regards to Walser's self-image, as well as his function as a social mouthpiece: "Ich bin das Volk" ("I am the people").

As Ignatz Bubis (1999: 59) summed it up back then, a large part of the populace had long been thinking like Walser, wanting to draw a "Schlussstrich" under the Nazi past in order to look towards the future without the burdens of remembrance and memorialization. This analysis was also supported by a FORSA survey commissioned by the newspaper *Die Woche* and conducted in May 2000, showing that 62% of West Germans and 49% of East Germans believed it was time to draw "a *Schlussstrich* under National Socialism" (cf. anon. 2000: 7).

In response to the social shift that had emerged in the wake of the Walser speech and its reactions, the education researchers Klaus Ahlheim and Bardo Heger (2002a) conducted an empirical study of antisemitism and attitudes towards the Nazi past among students at the University of Essen. This study further corroborated the widespread prevalence of a "*Schlussstrich* mentality," coupled with a desire for "normality" and a new national pride, that built upon motifs of secondary antisemitism: "One of the more striking findings is that, among many students, this *Schlussstrich* mentality is accompanied by a worldview and lifestyle that is strongly marked by materialist and hedonist tendencies, is rather uninterested in solidarity, and is quite plainly uncomfortable with the burdens of the past." (Ahlheim/Heger 2002b: 21)

More than a third of the interviewed students agreed with the statement that it was time to "draw a *Schlussstrich* under the National Socialist past;" furthermore, this attitude was closely associated with the desire for a new national self-confidence (cf. Ahlheim/Heger 2002a: 24ff.). When asked about the cultivation of a "gesundes Nationalbewusstsein" ("healthy national consciousness/self-confidence"), 61% of students spoke in favor, while just 14% rejected it unconditionally. In fact, hardly any other attitude correlated so strongly with the desire for a "*Schlussstrich*" as the espousal of a "gesundes Nationalbewusstsein": "Among the students who were not at all interested in a 'gesundes Nationalbewusstsein', only 13% favored a '*Schlussstrich*,' but among

those who strongly supported calls for a 'gesundes Nationalbewusstsein,' it was 65%." (Ahlheim/Heger 2002b: 21)

Furthermore, Ahlheim and Heger showed in their study that guilt-deflecting antisemitism in particular was common among students—a group destined to exercise great influence on the public discourse of the near future. For example, 17% of students believed that many Jews have attempted to "use the history of the Third Reich for their own benefit today, making the Germans pay for it," and 20% affirmed that the Jews know "very well" how to "exploit the guilty conscience of the Germans" (cf. Ahlheim/Heger 2002a: 48 ff.).

Looking at the two public controversies that were happening simultaneously in the early summer of 2002, surrounding the antisemitic statements of the FDP (Free Democratic Party) politician Jürgen W. Möllemann and the writer Martin Walser, another aspect of latent guilt-deflecting antisemitism can be identified. Both debates included a suppression of remembrance, a swapping of victims and perpetrators, and an ostensible breaking of taboos in defiance of imaginary "thought prohibitions and opinion monopolies." Michael Naumann (2002a: 10) draws a "direct line" from "Martin Walser's fateful speech at the Peace Prize ceremony in the Paulskirche to Jürgen Möllemann's antisemitic outbursts and the populist attitudes of the FDP leadership." A similar argument is put forth by Micha Brumlik (2002): "That which Walser has been preparing for years, and prepared with the doggedness of an experienced author, step by step, tale by tale, speech by speech, is now being implemented in the political sphere by Jürgen Möllemann, whose Arab-influenced Jew-hating reaffirms a considerable biographical continuity."

Both Walser and Möllemann claimed to be victims of a "Meinungsmafia" ("opinion mafia"), and as fighting for the freedom of opinion. The debate surrounding Jürgen Möllemann reestablished antisemitism as an officially endorsed and accepted factor in Germany's political culture (cf. Brumlik 2002). To achieve this, one simply needed to invoke the old familiar Judeophobic motifs and bring them into the political arena. The controversy began with antisemitic and anti-Israel statements made by Jamal Karsli, who was then defecting to the FDP, and by Jürgen Möllemann, who at the time was FDP floor leader in the state assembly and president of the FDP state party in North Rhine-Westphalia. Karsli, a former Green Party member of the state assembly in North Rhine-Westphalia (2002), gave an interview in the right-wing extremist weekly newspaper *Junge Freiheit* in which

he asserted the existence of a "Zionist lobby," which controlled "the greatest share of media influence in the world," and which had the power to "undercut any public figure, regardless of prominence." According to him, when "the subject of Israel" comes up, reminders of National Socialism are used against the Germans to "try and intimidate, directly and viscerally, so that they dare not open their mouths." In a press release from April 2002, Karsli accused the Israeli government of using "Nazi methods." At the time, Möllemann publicly supported Karsli. After weeks of silence in the face of public controversy, and later half-hearted statements of disapproval from the FDP national chief (and today's German Foreign Minister) Guido Westerwelle, Karsli ultimately retracted his request to join the Free Democratic Party.

Möllemann, the "prototype of modern antisemites" (Broder 2002: 26), helped articulate the antisemitism that has emerged since and "because of" Auschwitz, which portrays Jews as unpleasant reminders and rememberers of National Socialist crimes, and obstacles ostensibly preventing Germany's "normalization" and thereby violating its "positive Nationalbewusstsein." After the start of the controversy, and after Möllemann made his jibes against Friedman, the FDP managed to increase its share in the opinion polls, from 9 up to 12% (cf. Pötl 2002: 36): "It was only when the party leadership started to teeter in its balancing act between the 'moderate' Westerwelle and the 'radical' Möllemann, and this was seen by the public as either a disunity or a weakness in leadership, that the FDP began sinking in the opinion polls, from 12 down to 10%." (Funke/Rensmann 2002: 827)

During the Walser and Möllemann controversies, a frequent question was whether it was acceptable to criticize Israel at all—but the question itself was a red herring. Criticism of Israel is constantly and frequently heard in Germany as elsewhere. The question itself harks back to the antisemitic motifs of an omnipotent Jewish world conspiracy and an "Auschwitz bludgeon" raised at every whim. In this scenario, Walser and Möllemann presented themselves as the liberators of "repressed" opinions. That is how they and their supporters managed to deceive, using a classic strategy: first, to claim there exists a taboo topic that cannot be "openly" discussed, and then to enthusiastically break this imaginary taboo, thereby delighting the audience. This antisemitic demand for the abolishment of an alleged thought prohibition—which in fact implies the abolishment of a civilizational cornerstone—has already had an effect, as can be seen by examining

recent empirical studies, as well as by analyzing the way Jews have lately been treated in the everyday life of German society.

According to a mid-2002 survey conducted by the Anti-Defamation League (2002: 6), 32% of Germans alleged that Jews wield too much influence in the "business world," while 21% believed that "the Jews" were more inclined than other people to use "shady practices" in pursuing their goals. Furthermore, 24% agreed with the suggestion that Jews did not care what happened to other (non-Jewish) people. However, the strongest bias was shown by the 55% of respondents who agreed that (German) Jews were more loyal to Israel than to Germany. In 1999, when posed with the statement that some people considered Jews unpleasant, 56% of Germans said they found it incomprehensible, while 20% found it understandable; by April 2002, the first figure had fallen to 38%, and second figure had risen to 36% (cf. Brähler/Richter 2002: 2). In this survey, one fifth of Germans blamed "the Jews" for major world conflicts (cf. *ibid.*: 5).

These results thoroughly support Elmar Brähler's assessment that western Germany has seen a "dramatic rise in antisemitism" and "a definite increase in the whitewashing of National Socialism" (Langenau 2002). According to a representative survey from April 2002, 28% of Germans nationwide agreed that the influence of "the Jews" was "too great," with western Germany registering an especially rapid increase in this statistic during the previous four years, from 14% in 1998 to 31% in 2002 (cf. Niedermayer/Brähler 2002: 8ff.). Furthermore, 20% of respondents agreed that "the Jews" possessed something "inherently distinct and idiosyncratic" and did not fit in "with us," while 23% believed that Jews were more prone than other people to using "dirty tricks" in pursuit of their goals (cf. *ibid.*: 11f.).

According to the first survey conducted by the long-term study "Gruppenbezogene Menschenfeindlichkeit" ("group-focused enmity"), approximately one fifth of Germans agree with sentiments similar to those favored by Walser and Möllemann: thus, 22% of respondents feel that "Jews have too much influence in Germany," while 17% feel that "Jews share responsibility for their own persecution." Furthermore, every second respondent (52%) believes that "Jews try to benefit from the Holocaust—and they make Germans pay for the past" (cf. Bittner 2002). Similar results were also found in subsequent years, with surveys conducted by the American Jewish Committee (2005) and the Anti-Defamation League (2002; 2004; 2005; 2007; 2009).

III. *Antisemitic Guilt Deflection and the New German Victim Discourse*

As can be seen, the willingness to publicly express antisemitic sentiments has not receded in recent years, despite repeated ritual vows by numerous politicians. In fact, quite the contrary is true: since Walser's speech at the Paulskirche (1998) at the latest, one has seen an increasing willingness among the German populace to publicly express these antisemitic sentiments. Lars Rensmann (2004: 498) calls this gradual normalization an "erosion of boundaries," while Kurt Grünberg (2002) speaks of a "rehabilitation of antisemitism." There exist numerous forums for antisemitic speech, including letters to the editor and internet websites, as well as the hate mail (of varying emotional lucidity) that arrives regularly at Jewish organizations in Germany, in which anonymity has frequently been forsaken for some time now, often including complete addresses and even other personal and biographical details (cf. Salzborn/Schwietring 2003: 43ff.; Salzborn 2005a: 919ff.).

Building on the model of communicative latency developed by Werner Bergmann and Rainer Erb (1986: 223ff.), empirical social studies have attempted in various ways to distinguish the dimensions of antisemitism. The concept of communicative latency assumes that the pressures produced by the political and social elites since the founding of the Federal Republic have resulted in antisemitic attitudes no longer being expressed in public, despite still existing in latent form, and that if they are articulated at all, then it is only within the framework of private discussions, or in semi-private situations (e.g. among barroom regulars). According to this, the public suppression of antisemitic sentiments and the resultant wide-reaching communication blackout means that antisemitic attitudes are largely kept out of public discourse, so that in the long run they should in fact undergo a reduction, due to no longer being circulated.

While this analysis was largely valid for the "old" Federal Republic (up until 1989/90), it has found the limits of its applicability in the years since German reunification. Ever since Walser's speech at the Paulskirche, and the subsequent controversies surrounding him and Möllemann, antisemitic statements by prominent figures have led to increasingly frequent public scandals, which are particularly characterized by the fact that neither the antisemitic projections, their socio-structural contexts, nor their psychological dispositions are subjected to close examination; instead, these events are simply framed as media

scandals: "A [...] danger is posed to democratic political culture in that antisemitism is now often seen as simply a recrimination—and a particularly 'Jewish' one—in political debates." (Rensmann 2004: 498)

Conversely, this has also led to the normalization of antisemitic positions in the public sphere, since antisemites like Jürgen Möllemann are not explicitly identified as such, nor does a substantial engagement with his positions take place; to pursue this example further, Möllemann is instead framed as simply a bogeyman whose positions have ostensibly been made taboo, but it is precisely because of this demonization that the *content* of his ideas have only marginally been analyzed, thus allowing them to become anchored as a constant and accepted component of public discourse.

In looking at what is now permitted in terms of discourse, another relevant aspect is that the last few years have seen a change in the motifs of antisemitic sentiments—in other words, their projective focus has changed: whereas racially based and Christian religiously based forms of antisemitism were the main targets of the communicative taboo (and it is worth considering whether such a taboo actually existed in postwar Germany, or whether this itself was a fantasy of the antisemites—and certainly in this case, a sociopolitically very useful one), the latest manifestations of antisemitism are generally not subject to this taboo (cf. Benz 2004: 33ff.). Beyond guilt-deflecting antisemitism, which is often called secondary antisemitism (cf. Heni 2008), this analysis is especially relevant in looking at anti-Zionist antisemitism, as well as the allied Islamic antisemitism (cf. Milson 2003: 23ff.; Wurst 2005). Here, the communicative taboo is largely annulled and circumvented.

However, if these newer forms of antisemitic articulation only serve as a rhetorical detour for traditional antisemitic sentiments—as empirically demonstrated for the first time by Heyder/Iser/Schmidt (2005: 144ff.) in their corroborating factor analysis—then this could also result in a shift in communicative latency, because antisemitic stereotypes (such as those presented under the guise of critiquing Israel and globalization) are no longer socially stigmatized, allowing for them to be publicly communicated without problem, and ensuring that they find their supporters within the broader political spectrum (cf. Bergmann/Heitmeyer 2005: 224ff.).

This is how—among antisemites—a positive identification with the German nation becomes established, in which "deutsch-sein" ("being German") is not put into question, and there is no engagement with

the negative aspects of German history. In this worldview, ambivalence does not exist (or only to a very limited degree), and is replaced by the sole objective of emphasizing and glorifying the aspects that one considers positive. This identification with the German nation becomes a complementary substitute object, standing in for one's own parents, with whom a critical examination has also been avoided.

Psychoanalytically speaking, this process of positively identifying with the German nation and its history involves a substitution of the individual's super-ego with an external authority (cf. Freud 1921: 73ff.)—in other words, an externalization (cf. Adorno 1951: 416); here, the important point is that this process of identification with the German nation is the direct expression of an authority relationship. When a person is bound by an authoritarian bond to a person (e.g. father, political leader) or a group (e.g. a sports club) because the dialectic of dutifulness and mastery provides for pleasure and satisfaction, this person will also behave similarly in relation to non-personal entities: "Wherever this personality senses power, he is bound to honor and love it, almost automatically. It does not matter whether this is the power of a person, an institution, or a socially approved idea." (Fromm 1936: 115)

The external force is transformed by the super-ego into an internal force. This external force, as represented by the authorities, becomes internalized, so that the individual obeys its commands and prohibitions no longer just because of threatened external punishments, but now because of the fears engendered by the psychic entity that has developed internally. Here, the super-ego stands in a dialectic with authority: on the one hand, it itself is an internalization of this authority, but on the other hand, authority is transfigured by it (through the projection of super-ego attributes) and in this transfigured form once more internalized (cf. *ibid.*: 84f.). Thus, it can be said that: "Not only is the super-ego an internalized authority and authority a personified super-ego, these two act together to create a voluntary compliancy and subservience, which marks social practice to an astonishing degree." (Fromm 1936: 87)

The central point is that this non-ambivalent identification with the German nation and its history combined with a non-confrontation with one's own parents represents a two-sided problem: on the one hand, a generalized and psychoanalytic one, and on the other hand, a specific one regarding the complicity of one's parents in the Nazi past, so that the urge towards national identification becomes a form of

double infantilism (i.e. individually and historically). Politically speaking, this identification is achieved on the one hand by exonerating the perpetrator collective and casting German history in a purely positive light, and on the other hand by projecting one's own responsibility and guilt onto the victims. These dimensions of exoneration and projection have become most clearly amalgamated in the new German victim discourse, which over the last few years has culminated in the formula of "Flucht und Vertreibung" ("flight and expulsion"), as well as the controversy surrounding the "Zentrum gegen Vertreibungen" ("Center Against Expulsions") (cf. Hahn/Hahn 2001: 335ff.).

The goal of this debate is to imply that Germans *in general* were victims of National Socialism, and to claim that National Socialism was simply the prologue to *Flucht und Vertreibung* (and not the reverse, with the expulsions being an epilogue to National Socialism), and that the expulsions were not only morally objectionable, but also politically, and above all legally so. This revisionist position—regardless of any question of morality and humaneness, the expulsions were in fact endorsed by international law and represented a politically legitimate consequence of Germany's genocidal policies in Eastern Europe—will now be set in concrete with the building in Berlin of a center for German victims, a "Zentrum gegen Vertreibungen," in accordance with the will of German expellee associations: to quote the President of the Federation of Expellees, Erika Steinbach, this "Zentrum gegen Vertreibungen" will be placed in "historical and spatial proximity" to the Holocaust Memorial (cf. Wonka 2000). The conceptual role model for this project is the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C. The implication of Steinbach's statement could hardly be more obvious: one seeks "historical" proximity to the extermination of the Jews, or more succinctly, to their victim status. Steinbach expressed it this way: "Basically, these two topics—Jews and expellees—complement one another. This dehumanizing *Rassenwahn* ['racial fanaticism'], both here and over there, should also be a focus of our *Zentrum*." (cited in Wonka 2000)

This comparison turns historical reality on its head. In fact, the resettlement of the Germans took place as a consequence of National Socialism and the genocide of European Jews. In contrast to Nazi policies, the resettlement was anchored in international law by the Potsdam Agreement, which is still legitimate today. Applying the word "Rassenwahn" to the resettlement is also inaccurate, in that this policy was not conducted due to racial reasons, but to anti-Nazi ones, in order

to reduce the potential for future conflicts in Eastern Europe. After all, the German minorities (or "Volksdeutsche," as they were called back then) of Eastern Europe had also stoked the flames of social and political conflict during National Socialism (cf. Salzborn 2000: 22ff.). This had formed the basis of Nazi foreign policy, at least until it began pursuing its goals by military means. *Volkstumspolitik* (or politics guided by ethnic concerns), which itself aimed at resettling Germans eastwards, was ultimately foundational to the preparation and implementation of German conquest and annihilation policies. Recent sociohistorical research has even demonstrated a structural connection between German *Volkstumspolitik* and minorities policies in Eastern Europe, and the mass extermination of European Jews (cf. Haar 2000: 485ff.). This policy of Germanization was simply the flip side of the annihilation suffered by European Jews: what the Nazis called "völkische Flurbereinigung" ("ethnic land clearance") was meant to create space for the *Volksdeutsche*, meaning that the majority of future expellees were at least passive participants (and in many cases active ones, as shown by many historical studies)⁴ in the *völkisch* and antisemitic policies of occupation and extermination. However, these aspects are conveniently ignored in the current debates.

Instead, conservatives try to focus on the innocence of selected individuals, for example by using movies to depict the case histories of those who were children at the time of expulsion—in other words, those who really did bear no personal guilt; within the politics of remembrance, these children's experiences are portrayed as representative cases, and not just those of a minority, as was historically the case. This personification serves to de-territorialize historical guilt by symbolically subsuming the perpetrators into the non-identity of the German people, which itself is unjustly forced to pay for "Hitler's crimes." This is how the portrayal of individual innocence circuitously mutates into the myth of collective innocence, through this communal identification with the innocent bystanders, who, as "average Germans," allegedly have nothing to do with the perpetrators. In this way, real and widespread complicity becomes inverted into a claim of blamelessness, which is to be applied collectively instead of individually, as would otherwise be the case in a state of law: thus,

⁴ For an additional overview of current research on the situation in individual countries, see Salzborn 2005b: 81.

according to an opinion survey commissioned in the autumn of 2003 by the German newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeinen Zeitung* (October 23, 2003) and the Polish newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza* (October 21, 2003), over 90% of Germans nowadays consider themselves to be victims of World War II too.

A striking aspect of this projection is the object of its indirectly articulated desire: although the victim status may often *seem* like a badge of privilege in historical and political debates, the *reality* of being a victim is anything but desirable, and every victim of violence would certainly prefer having avoided it. In turn, this projective envy finds expression in the belief (as corroborated by numerous empirical studies) that Jews are trying to use the Nazi past for their own benefit.

In this regard, one can agree with Béla Grunberger (1962: 256) when he states that "the projections of the antisemite form the core of his conflicts, and this central core is not further resolvable." This highlights the defense mechanism triggered by internal feelings of inferiority and guilt, in which one's own evils become projected upon the Jews, as much as the envy one feels towards their abilities and successes, both real and imaginary (cf. Grünberg 2002). Here, in addition to the previously described aspects of authoritarianism, identification with the impersonal authority of the "German Nation," and the yearning to take part in and become part of the imaginary invincibility of this collective, a further, central element of narcissism consists of the early-childhood fantasy of omnipotence, or the "God complex" (Richter 1979); this desire to be all-powerful and immortal is permanently thwarted on a daily basis, thereby producing a narcissistic wound (cf. Wirth 2003). Therefore, the antisemite finds the Jews to be despicable precisely because they possess (in his fantasies) the omnipotence that he desires so much, while *at the same time*, he projects all the emotionally unpleasant (and unconscious) elements of his own megalomania (his "own evils") onto the Jews, in what Béla Grunberger and Pierre Dessuant (2000: 329) aptly termed a "projective identification": "Horror and fascination exist side by side. [...] that the antisemite fears the thing inside himself: he projects upon the Jew his own, unintegrated anal drive." (Ibid.: 335) Or, in the words of Theodor W. Adorno (1955: 232): "One's own drives, repressions, and unconscious aspects are ascribed to others. This is how one comes to terms with the demands of one's own super-ego, and at the same time finds occasion, under the banner of legitimate punishment, to vent one's own aggressive tendencies."

Under the watchful eye of the antisemite's own internal control mechanisms, both individual/psychological and collective/political, the antisemitic delusion cannot allow itself to be unmasked as being delusional; therefore, the antisemitic worldview requires Freudian rationalizations that affirm its factuality and deny its irrationality. Here, the antisemite denies "the use he has made of the Jew for the sake of his mental hygiene" (Grunberger/Dessuant 2000: 350), which is most clearly demonstrated by historical and contemporary attempts by antisemites to "prove" the existence of a "Jewish world conspiracy" (cf. Jaecker 2004).

In the context of German secondary antisemitism, this deflection of guilt and remembrance in connection with projection leads to a particular dynamic in the unconscious:

The Jews are 'unheimlich' ['sinister'] because they represent one's own repressed tendencies, and because they are a reminder of an external reality from which one no longer wants to hear. The 'Final Solution' envisioned the elimination of all witnesses. Non-Jews were supposed to be spared such unpleasant memories after the war. The surviving Jews embody these memories. They are experienced by the next generation as troublemakers disturbing their inner unconflicted state. The guilt of the parents should stay concealed. However, this can only lead to the strengthening of antisemitic ideas, not their weakening. [...] The narcissistic framework of the children of 'persecutors' becomes traumatized if the omnipotence of the parents is identified with persecution and mass murder. [...] The drive conflicts associated with primal identifications remain in existence, and the Oedipal conflict stays unresolved. That is why this industrial mass extermination is obscured and euphemized. One speaks of a 'holocaust', a burnt offering, as if the Jews had been sacrificed. In reality, they had been exterminated like vermin. After the fact, one tries to take Nazi ideology and justify it, negate it, rationalize it, or secretly maintain it. (Brainin et al. 1993: 58, 60)

Beyond a few exceptional cases, today's generation of parents completely refrained from confronting their own parents, the actual perpetrators of National Socialism, or else only obliquely criticized the Nazi movement with coded references to "fascism" and the surveillance state, thereby rationalizing the antisemitic core of Nazi politics and in fact subsuming it into capitalism, as astutely recognized by Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel (1985: 160) as early as the mid-1980s: "In Germany, one speaks not of Nazism, but of fascism. [...] Among West Germans, the term 'fascism' functions to downplay the Hitler regime, as if it was just another kind of fascism like that of Mussolini, Franco, or Pinochet, just another entirely banal dictatorship. This brushes aside

the essence of National Socialism, namely the racial ideology, whose logical consequences were to be the 'Final Solution' and the thousand-year domination of the world by the Aryans."

This refusal to confront the concrete perpetrators of National Socialism (manifested as silence or rationalization) has resulted in an emotional inheritance that is now being passed on to the grandchildren, who in turn are exhibiting even more intense forms of deflecting guilt and memory, in that the avoidance is now doubled: challenging one's parents would necessarily require a double-critique, not only of the parents themselves, but also of the uncritical way they handled their own history (both individual and collective) in the (non)dialogue conducted with the grandparent generation.

Instead, as described by Elisabeth Brainin, Vera Ligeti and Samy Teicher (1993: 64), a "Deckidentität" ("cover identity") is created, which, in the process of dealing with the past, can take various forms, ranging from a blanket denial of guilt, to a demonization of specific perpetrator types, to a leveling of responsibility through victim/perpetrator inversions, to an identification with the victims of National Socialism. Until a few years ago, pains were taken not only in the public and social spheres, but also sometimes in the scholarly context, to dissociate the perpetrators of the Shoah from the everyday life of Germany. Sometimes they were portrayed as maniacal monsters or brutal savages, sometimes as emotionless and indifferent bureaucrat perpetrators, sometimes as criminal or antisocial elements; furthermore, it was not uncommon to portray the Shoah as the product of a small political or even economic elite within the Nazi leadership (cf. Paul 2002; Salzborn 2002).

Today, this is reflected by a kind of rationalizing non-remembrance occurring in private memories, as clearly demonstrated by a study into the remembrance of National Socialism and the Shoah within German familial memories (Welzer et al. 2002). This showed that Nazi perpetrators may even be seen as victims in the eyes of their children and grandchildren, because these later generations possess insufficient knowledge of the Nazi past and the Shoah, and also believe that their parents or grandparents had been the victims of secret surveillance, terror campaigns, war, bombing, and imprisonment. Since these later generations morally condemn Nazi perpetrators, considering them "bad" and "evil," they recast their own parents and grandparents in the role of resistance fighters and victims of National Socialism.

The currently hegemonic form of *Deckidentität* consists of building up a myth of collective innocence, in which one talks about "German

victims" without *actually* addressing National Socialism. Here, the historical context should be made to disappear, and the causal relationships between German *Volkstumspolitik* and annihilation policies on the one hand and the resulting resettlement of Germans and the bombing of German cities on the other hand should all be excised from memory, without their ever having been seriously addressed within social discourse. The repeated allegation that Germans have suffered a declaration of collective guilt, which never in fact existed as a principle guiding the policies of the Allies and their associates (cf. Frei 2005: 145ff.; Salzborn 2003: 17ff.), is met with an interpretation of history that aims at creating a myth of German collective *innocence*.

The reality of having accepted National Socialism's teachings that promised Germans special privileges in the world, and the reality that during National Socialism one had projected one's own aggressions onto fellow human beings, who in this act of projection became transformed into subhumans, caused the overwhelming majority of Germans not to feel something like shame, but instead elicited the childish excuse that one had "just" been following the Führer. As underlined by Alexander und Margarete Mitscherlich (1980: 53f.), this explains the "tendency of many Germans after the war to take on the role of the innocent victim. Every single one experienced the disappointment of his *own* yearning for protection and leadership; he was misled, seduced, left in the lurch, and finally expelled and despised, despite having offered nothing but obedience, which was the citizen's first obligation."

This infantile attitude "forgets" not only the historical facts, but also inverts the victim-perpetrator relationship to one's own benefit, so that although one may be lamenting an act of destruction and annihilation, it is only in regards to one's own situation and yearnings.

This deflection of guilt and denial of history, already attested in the postwar period, was accompanied by a downright ritualized cultivation of one's own blamelessness and victim status, which weighs on the present once again like a recurring nightmare—although this time with an important modification that shifts the orientation of the *Deckidentität* so that Nazi atrocities are no longer generally denied, but historically normalized instead. In this context, National Socialism becomes a deconcretized artifact; for if one actually spoke about the facts, namely *Volkstumspolitik* and extermination, then it would become obvious that the professed victim status of the Germans is historically untenable. Furthermore, although the horrors of National Socialism

may be abstractly condemned, they are also meticulously isolated from their historical context. Thus, cause and effect disappear from the account, and the idea of causality itself is simply not acknowledged; the account becomes dominated by accident and destiny, and above all, a depersonalization of Nazi history. Questions are no longer asked about who organized and implemented the Shoah, who concealed it, supported it, or at least kept silent about it. Ultimately, current efforts to construct a *Deckidentität* have led to a blurring of the line between fact and fiction, as well as between individual and collective, which has paved the way for massive generalizations regarding *Flucht und Vertreibung*, and the moral judgment of this as an "injustice."

These phenomena are accompanied in wider society by a massive resistance to facts, particularly exemplified by the education system's obfuscation of National Socialism; although there exists a widespread myth that National Socialism is being constantly addressed, the majority of Germans in fact knows nearly nothing about it (cf. Ahlheim/Heger 2002; Silbermann/Stoffers 2000). In this context, the German victim myth ties in with the perpetual assertion of innocence, from which spring the constantly repeated calls for a "Schlussstrich," as advocated by approximately one quarter of Germans in a recent study conducted by the American Jewish Committee (2005).

The core problem (both politically and psychologically) remains the lack of a critical "processing of the past" (Adorno 1959: 555). Often, the frequently bizarre-seeming rituals of public contrition have—paradoxically—more to do with exonerating one's own parents and grandparents, by taking concrete deeds and dissolving them into an abstract haze of generalized violence, or submerging them into the fantasy of having been forced to cooperate; they have more to do with equalizing victims and perpetrators, conjuring a general and diffuse impression of helplessness (and sometimes a projective over-identification with the victims, avoiding the contemplation of one's own perpetrator role by envying the victims their victim status, which every real victim wishes to have been spared in the first place). They have little to do with any attempt to work on and work through the barbarities contained within specific family histories, or to reflect on them and thereby enable an escape from this need for ritual commemorations that lack actual memory.

In this context, Elisabeth Brainin, Vera Ligeti and Samy Teicher (1993: 52) offered a key insight concerning the mass extermination of European Jews from a psychoanalytic perspective: "One can only

recognize this reality as such—one can never process it." The reemergence of repressed ideas can be shunted into a critical processing of the past only if the children and grandchildren of the German perpetrators admit that the Nazi regime was massively endorsed by the German populace—including one's own parents and/or grandparents—and that the overwhelming majority of Germans took part in the mass extermination of European Jews, both actively and passively (be it by participating in confiscations, acts of plunder, denunciations, executions, deportations, etc.; silencing and declining resistance; spreading antisemitic and racist sentiments; keeping silent about crimes; or by profiting from forced labor and "Aryanization"), and that *Volkstumpolitik* and extermination policies could only have been implemented with such barbarity because there existed a sweeping consensus between the Nazi leadership and the German populace.

This would imply not only a working on, and a working through, within the collective memory of the nation, but also individually within one's own family history (cf. Rensmann 1998):

In fact, it could be said that one only becomes free of neurotic guilt and capable of overcoming the whole complex if one first sees oneself as guilty, even for those things in which one had no hand. (Adorno 1955: 320)

However, this idea is rarely reflected in the politics of remembrance in Germany, or even in the handling of today's antisemitism. Instead, the exact opposite is closer to the truth, as recently illustrated by a March 2010 article in *tageszeitung*—a politically Green, alternative newspaper—in which Iris Hefets labels Holocaust commemoration "a kind of religion" and writes dismissively of a "Shoah cult," while at the same time defending radical "anti-Zionists" such as Norman G. Finkelstein against criticism. This article is all the more remarkable for having been published by the left-wing alternative *tageszeitung*, because this demonstrates that not only has a critical processing of the past been omitted in Germany, but quite on the contrary, criticism is now being directed at those who campaign for a remembrance of the Shoah and a critical examination of National Socialism.

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